
To prevent and treat disease and disability; to promote healthy lifestyles; and to protect and promote the health and quality of our environment.

NEWS

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CDHD advises that homemade bottled garlic-in-oil may harbor botulism toxins

BOISE, Idaho, November 5, 2002 -- 'Tis the season for cooking, hosting parties and, of course, gift giving. And while gifts of homemade food and other edibles are popular items during the holidays, they also can be a source of illness if not cooked, refrigerated or handled properly.

According to Bob Jue, Public Health Specialist for the Central District Health Department (CDHD), fresh herbs, spices, or garlic-in-oil mixtures are of particular concern because the mixture is a prime environment for the growth of *Clostridium botulinum*, more commonly known as botulism.

Botulism can cause blurred vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, and muscle weakness. If left untreated, it can result in paralysis and even death.

Jue said that the fresh herbs, spices, and garlic-in-oil mixtures are low in acid, which supports the growth of botulism when given the right conditions. "Improper home preparation and storage, lack of oxygen in the oil, moisture, room temperatures and low acidity all favor the growth of botulism," said Jue. "We strongly discourage people from preparing these products at home." He said that, by law, commercially prepared mixtures do contain additives that increase their acidity and inhibit bacterial growth.

Jue suggests that people wishing to give homemade gifts of food follow safe food-handling practices which include washing their hands and surfaces often; separating raw meat and chicken from other foods; cooking food to proper temperatures; and, refrigerating or freezing foods promptly.

For more information call the CDHD at 327-7499, or visit www.cdhd.org/EnvironmentalHealth or the US Food Safety and Inspection Service at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov>.

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